

The Taborite politicians, who mixed up politics with a visionary religious fanaticism, were not the men to vindicate the rights of man in a reasonable, enduring fashion.

In the intellectual sphere the revolutionary trend of the age is equally unmistakable. At first sight there is not much that is revolutionary in the Revival of Learning. The scholar who studied Greek manuscripts and annotated editions of the classics does not look like a revolutionist. The printer, the man of science, the mathematician, the inventor, the explorer, who gave expression, each in his own fashion, to the new intellectual movement, were not, as a rule, conscious of a mission to revolutionise the world. And yet they played a part in a revolutionary movement. The scholar, the printer, the inventor, the man of science, even the explorer who gave scope in his own adventurous fashion to the throbbing life of the time, were, consciously or unconsciously, working for the subversion of the old order of things. The humanist, in particular, was the prophet of a new culture, a new educational system, a new theology which must shake tradition to its foundations, end in the overthrow of the traditional learning, the rending in twain, if not the complete overthrow, of the old Church. Nay, the battle was already being waged between progressive and conservative, between the men of progress and the votaries of tradition. In this battle the printer was the most potent ally of the humanist, for the printer diffused the new culture by means of his press, opened the flood-gates of knowledge, sent forth edition after edition of the classics, and even of the Bible—translated Bibles, too—to quicken the intellectual ferment outside as well as inside the schools. The printer is, in truth, the greatest revolutionist that has ever appeared on earth. After the middle of the fifteenth century it was henceforth impossible to crush the critical spirit by means of inquisitions and holy crusades. Pope and priest might well tremble for their supremacy in the presence of the press, though the press might print and publish for as well as against the Church. And the day was coming when the now omnipotent, absolute king would have equal cause to fear the power of the press. The danger to the king was as yet not so appreciable as to pope and priest. But the critical spirit, born of the Renaissance, would not in the long-run stop short